

7 of 16 DOCUMENTS

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HEADLINE: COMMUNITY GROUPS HOLD HOUSE'S FATE IN THEIR HANDS;
CALVERT SCHOOL'S PLANS HAVE PRESERVATIONISTS UP IN ARMS

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BODY:

Six years after Calvert School drew protests for razing a 91-unit apartment complex at 4300 N. Charles St. to expand its campus, the school has sparked a new preservation controversy involving one of its own properties.

School officials disclosed this fall that they are seeking permission to tear down Castalia, a large stone residence at 200 Tuscany Road that was built by the school's first headmaster, possibly to make way for an outdoor amphitheater.

The hillside dwelling, now divided into apartments and vacant, is the work of Laurence Hall Fowler, a respected architect from the early 1900s who also designed Calvert School's 1920s-era building at 105 Tuscany Road and other residences in the area.

The private school can't move ahead with its demolition plan unless it receives permission from four community groups, because it entered into restrictive covenants with those groups when it sought approval for its last expansion, and those covenants would have to be revised to permit demolition. Some neighborhood residents say they would like to see the school preserve Castalia, which is part of the Tuscany-Canterbury national historic district in North Baltimore but is not protected by local landmark status.

"This house is an architectural gem," said Tom Bonsall, a writer and historian who lives in the Gardens of Guilford condominiums near the school and house. "More than that, though, it is a part of the historic legacy that makes our neighborhood what it is. ... If Castalia is destroyed, people will be bemoaning its loss for generations to come."

"The building should be preserved," agrees Johns Hopkins, executive director of Baltimore Heritage, an advocacy group, and a distant relative of the founder of the Johns Hopkins University. "Two of the main ways a building can be considered historic are if it is important architecturally and if it is associated with an important historic figure. Castalia combines both."

Castalia was built in 1928 by headmaster Virgil Hillyer, after the school moved from West Chase Street to its current location. Hillyer named it Castalia because the property is fed by a natural spring and Castalia, in Greek mythology, was a nymph whom Apollo transformed into a fountain. According to mythology, Castalia could inspire "the genius of poetry" in those who drank her waters or listened to their sound.

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Hillyer died of appendicitis three years after moving into the house, and his widow sold it in the 1930s. The school acquired it several years ago, after it had been divided into apartments.

The request to demolish Castalia is linked to another building project that Calvert School wants to undertake, the replacement of a former Hopkins fraternity house at 3906 Canterbury Road with a structure containing administrative and classroom space.

Calvert School has a contract to buy the fraternity house, but the sale is contingent on the school's receiving community approval for three requests. They are: 1) to purchase the fraternity house and rebuild on the site, 2) to tear down Castalia and 3) to increase enrollment at its lower school by 23 students, from 372 to 395.

Andrew Martire, the school's headmaster, told neighborhood residents during a recent tour of the Castalia property that school leaders are not entirely sure what they want to do with Castalia but are seeking permission to tear it down to keep their options open.

"We are seeking permission to take this house down and build an amphitheater," he said. "Not that we know we want to do this, but we might."

Martire said the two properties are linked because Calvert School bought Castalia before the fraternity house became available, and the contract for the fraternity house has forced school leaders to rethink their plans, given limited financial resources.

He said the school has obtained estimates that indicate Castalia could cost up to \$2 million to make barrier free and renovate for office use, and school leaders aren't sure they have the funds to do that and rebuild on the fraternity house site as well. He explained that replacing the house with an amphitheater would cost less than renovating it, and the school wouldn't have to spend money to heat or maintain the building. He stressed that the school's board has not made any final determination to raze Castalia but wants the flexibility to be able to do so.

"The question is, how much is financially responsible for the school to undertake for real estate development?" Martire said. "Two million dollars for a modest renovation for office space - we don't feel that's responsible."

Castalia was not purchased with the intention of razing the building, the headmaster said. "The property was purchased because it was a beautiful extension of the campus. Yes, the house looks beautiful on the outside. But an extension of the landscape could be beautiful too, depending on the way you do it."

Neighbors said during the tour of the Castalia property that they would like more information about why Calvert School needs an amphitheater, what night lights would be added, how much noise there would be, and what impact there would be on area parking and traffic patterns.

Martire said the school has a deadline of Dec. 14 to get the covenants amended and buy the fraternity house. If the school can't get community approval to raze Castalia and increase enrollment by then, he said last week, its contract to buy the fraternity house will fall through.

Community representatives say they're concerned that if they give approval this fall to raze Castalia to enable the sale of the fraternity house to proceed, they could regret the decision later.

Bonsall said after the tour that he was impressed by what good shape the house appears to be in. "It's in immaculate condition," he said. "You could pull a moving van up and move in today."

He added that he is surprised that the school would consider destroying part of its own heritage.

"It's not like there's someone else trying to come in and do it," he said. "They're doing it to themselves. I find it incomprehensible that they would be that cavalier with their own history."

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GRAPHIC: Photo(s)

Calvert School wants to raze Castalia, a large stone house on its campus.

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